

ENLIGHTENMENT, ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS,  
AND PARAPSYCHOLOGY

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en-light-en 1 archaic ILLUMINATE 2 a: to furnish knowledge  
to: INSTRUCT b: to give spiritual insight to

en-light-en-ment 1: the act or means of enlightening: the  
state of being enlightened 2 cap : a philosophic movement of  
the 18th century marked by questioning of traditional  
doctrines and values, a tendency toward individualism, and an  
emphasis on the idea of universal human progress, the  
empirical method in science, and the free use of reason -  
used with the 3 Buddhism: a final blessed state marked by  
the absence of desire or suffering

- Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1980)

The word enlightenment is used today in a wide variety of ways, both  
relative and absolute. These range from the trivial - you have reached  
enlightenment when you agree with me - to the most profound, where complete  
enlightenment refers to a permanent change of consciousness and being such that  
the completely enlightened person has evolved to the highest possibilities of

knowledge, happiness, and capability possible for a human mind.

Psychology is the study of the mind, including values and behavior. Enlightenment is a goal given a high value by hundreds of millions of people, including significant numbers of highly educated Westerners as well as Easterners. It is actively sought after by many of them, with practices designed to bring it about often being a major focus of life. Thus modern psychology, pursuing the study of phenomena that are frequent and/or important in human life, has devoted much study to and amassed much knowledge about enlightenment?

Obviously not.

A few transpersonal psychologists and parapsychologists have given some attention to the idea of enlightenment (see, e.g., Goleman, 1977; Green & Green, 1971; Maslow, 1969; Metzner, 1980; Ring, 1974; Shapiro, 1980; Shapiro & Walsh, 1984; White, 1984; Wilber, 1975; 1979), but by and large mainstream psychology has almost totally ignored it. No entries defining enlightenment appear in a recent, encyclopedic dictionary of psychology (Harré and Lamb, 1983), for example, or in the indices of a dozen mainstream introductory psychology textbooks I examined. This is probably due to general Western cultural unfamiliarity with enlightenment, as well as a prejudicial legacy of old battles between science and religion, but it is time for this ignorance to end if psychology.

This paper is an introduction to some aspects of enlightenment, primarily in relationship to our developing knowledge of altered states of consciousness and in relation to current parapsychological knowledge. It is not intended to be a representative survey of all that has been written and believed about enlightenment. I write from a particular perspective, namely my relatively unenlightened Western professional and personal knowledge of altered states, parapsychology and psychological growth, and also as a human being interested in

human possibilities. My hope is that this introductory consideration will provoke research in this vital area of human knowledge.

### What is Enlightenment?

The typical dictionary definition, such as the one quoted above, barely begins to deal with enlightenment as a concept, much less as an experiential reality. As a more adequate (but far from complete) intellectual approach, we will let the term relative enlightenment refer to an experience and consequent changes in a person in which he gains cognitively and affectively significant insights into major and vital aspects of himself and/or aspects of his world, usually (but not always) in a sudden fashion. Consequently he usually finds his life significantly changed.

Defining enlightenment in this immediately raises the issue of degrees of enlightenment. Learning a more convenient telephone number to reach a colleague, e.g., or increasing your psychokinesis scores on an electronic random event generator from 51% to 52% instead of a chance 50%, both represent increases in knowledge, but we would not use the term enlightenment for these. A sudden key insight in psychotherapy, on the other hand, showing a hidden feeling complex with dozens of major ramifications in your life, and allowing major changes in lifestyle, might be usefully described as a minor relative enlightenment experience. Relative to your previous state of ignorance, you have become more enlightened. A near-death experience, in which you deeply understood that your life had been sterile because you hadn't learned to love (a typical experience of this sort: see, e.g., Moody, 1975; Ring, 1980; 1984), which then led to a deep loving attitude toward all people, would be more typical of the kind of experience we would call a major relative enlightenment experience, even though you did not feel that all possibilities of enlightenment

had been reached. Complete enlightenment would be the highest possible degree of enlightenment, such that the completely enlightened person has evolved to the highest possibilities of knowledge, happiness, and capability possible for a human. It is important not to confuse relative enlightenment with complete enlightenment.

#### A Note on Writing About Enlightenment

A part of my mind is highly amused that I plan to write about the nature of enlightenment. What presumption! Isn't enlightenment something possessed only by superhuman beings, and understood only by them? What in the world can a mere unenlightened Western psychologist have to say about it? Further, isn't enlightenment beyond expression in words?

Inexpressibility in words, ineffability, is what would be expected from the major spiritual traditions. We have all heard the classical quote from the Tao Te Ching,

"The Tao that can be spoken of is not the Tao."

In modern psychological terms, we could say that complete enlightenment and some aspects of relative enlightenment include vital knowledge that is state-specific (Tart, 1972), that is only fully accessible in various altered states of consciousness. Such state-specific knowledge is indeed often difficult, if not impossible, to express in ordinary words<sup>1</sup>.

Nevertheless, words and thoughts in our ordinary state can be useful in thinking about enlightenment, especially relative enlightenment. This is the case if we are careful not to confuse the words with the realities they point to.

As for enlightened persons being tremendously different from us, this may be true for the most profound enlightenment, but not so for many intermediate degrees of relative enlightenment. I find it helpful to think about

enlightenment as a continuum, rather than an all-or-none state: thus the term relative enlightenment. Just seeing enlightenment as a totally-incomprehensible-to-us end point, with no intermediate steps, does indeed make it difficult to talk about, and difficult to think of personally attaining or understanding. Compared to the rest of us, for example, a pilot is enlightened about flying airplanes, but she didn't get that way in a single, magical act: she studied for a long time, moving along a continuum from being completely unenlightened about flying to knowing more and more about it. When we think about relative enlightenment on a continuum, we can see it as a process, not just a final state.

#### Assumptions About Human Nature in Enlightenment Traditions

To begin to understand enlightenment, we must have a broader view of human beings than the current materialistic view that identifies mind as totally equivalent to body, brain, and nervous system, that sees physical realities as the only realities, and that sees life as a random, meaningless accident in an essentially dead and purposeless universe. To sketch this broader picture, I shall note some basic assumptions that are widespread in all spiritual traditions known to me that deal with enlightenment.

(1) Experience, mind, is seen as a primary reality, not an epiphenomenon of matter. This assumption receives widespread support from the data of parapsychology.

(2) The ordinary state of mind is seen as frequently being a state of "waking sleep" or "illusion" (Tart, 1986). Mind is immersed and lost in cravings, daydreams, attachments, delusions, and projections. The widespread distribution of these deluded qualities of ordinary mind, is, unfortunately, "normal." Buddhists believe, for example, that we live in a mental state of

"illusion" (samsara), and our widespread suffering stems from this.

(3) Techniques for strengthening and clarifying attention are thus primary in the search for truth about the nature of reality. Mind is real and vital, our primary tool, but its ordinary scattered, weak, deluded condition makes it a poor tool. It must be strengthened and sharpened.

(4) Experience is given primacy over interpretation, belief and theory. There is widespread recognition in the enlightenment traditions that beliefs and emotional attachment to beliefs can distort our perception of ourselves and external reality, and distort our reasoning processes. This means that mental examination of the bases of beliefs and experiences is absolutely necessary.

Scientific data are in no way excluded from this search if we clearly distinguish observation from interpretation of observation, and do not become emotionally attached to interpretations/theories. This assumption is highly congruent with the best aspects of scientific method.

#### Some Consequences of Enlightenment Experiences

The typical outcome of both relative and complete enlightenment experiences is a view of the universe quite different from our culture's current materialistic beliefs. It is a view that is based on deep personal experience, rather than on intellectual conviction or cultural conditioning, and allows a kind of happiness that is not easily destroyed by changes in external circumstances. Briefly, it includes the experiential knowledge that (a) the universe is inherently meaningful and purposeful; (b) mind exists in some form beyond what we ordinarily think of as matter; (c) there is an objective morality and lawful, long-term consequences of living or not living in accordance with it; (d) many if not all the sufferings of ordinary human life can be transcended by a combination of morality and cultivation of the mind; (e) a state of complete knowledge of all that is important, with accompanying happiness of a



deep kind, is possible; and (f) an enlightened person is far more capable and naturally desirous than an unenlightened person of helping others who are still suffering.

Now we shall look at aspects of enlightenment that involve altered states of consciousness. I use the term altered state of consciousness in the precise sense of a discrete altered state of consciousness: details can be found elsewhere (Tart, 1975; 1983).

#### Assumptions from an Altered States Perspective

There are certain things I will take as givens for the purposes of this paper, even though each could be explored at length. These givens arose from my research with altered states of consciousness rather than the enlightenment tradition per se, but help in understanding both.

(5) Awareness is. Our basic ability to have experiences, to know that we are having them, to be aware, has never been satisfactorily explained in terms of anything else. Current Western science likes to assume that awareness will be explained as an aspect of brain functioning, reduced to "nothing but" some action of the brain, but this is an item of faith in promissory materialism, not good science. We may never be able to "explain" awareness. But we can be aware: that is an axiom.

(6) Consciousness, by which I mean that enormously elaborated, habituated, conditioned system of basic awareness which we normally experience as our mind, has, as one of its primary functions, the simulation of the environment and the self, the creation of an internal representation of the outside world and of oneself, so that we have a good "map" of the world and our place in it.

Most of you have seen pictures of flight simulators. These are devices for training pilots. You could train a pilot by having her read some instructions

and then putting her at the controls of a real airplane. It's a fine system, but costly. If she makes a mistake, the plane crashes. Instead you can have her enter a special room which looks just like a cockpit. When she operates the controls to start the simulator's "engines," she hears the sound, feels the vibration, and sees the appropriate meters reading out RPM, temperature, oil pressure, etc. She sees a runway and airport ahead of her when she looks out the simulator's "cockpit window," the scenery moves when she "taxi" the plane, etc. It's just like piloting a real plane as far as sensory feedback, with one important difference: when a fatal mistake is made that could lead to a crash, you get "CRASH!" displayed on the "cockpit window" instead of a dead trainee and a destroyed airplane. The trainee can go on to practice again.

Modern science has created a useful model of reality in which we "live in" a simulator. "Consciousness" is seen as being inside the brain. Consciousness per se has no direct access to the world around us (ignoring psi processes), but only to processes inside the brain. These brain processes take the information that our senses provide us about the world and create a simulation of that world. This brain simulation is our major tool for coping with ordinary reality, and so it is important that the simulation be accurate. The degree to which the simulation is accurate is an aspect of relative enlightenment. The degree to which the simulation is a poor representation of external reality, and the degree to which we mistakenly identify the simulation (experienced reality) with actual reality, are important aspects of lack of relative enlightenment.

(7) We have a basic nature. To be "human" is to have characteristics, potentials, limits. It is important, however, not to confuse what our ultimate nature is or might be with what we currently think it is, or with what we have been told or conditioned to believe it is.

(8) We have an acquired nature. Whatever our basic nature is, it has been subjected to an enormous amount of shaping, bending, conditioning,



indoctrination, development, repression, etc. during enculturation. In the course of being made into "normal" people, fitted into our particular culture's image of what normal is, our basic nature has been selectively modified. Our perceptions, thinking, emotional feelings, assumptions and intuitions, and behaviors have all been strongly molded. This has given us many useful skills as well as many insane sources of useless suffering. It is a great mistake to confuse our acquired nature, the product of our cultural and personal histories, with our basic nature. Most people do make this confusion and thus cut themselves off from many basic human possibilities.

To keep the acquired, semi-arbitrary, conditioned nature of our ordinary consciousness before us in the rest of the discussion, I shall not use the phrase "ordinary" or "normal" consciousness anymore. I shall substitute a technical term I introduced some years ago (Tart, 1975; 1983), consensus consciousness, to remind us how much our everyday consciousness has been shaped by the consensus of belief in our particular culture.

### Two Dimensions of Enlightenment

We can now consider some major aspects of enlightenment by an analogy.

A carpenter is a person who has to solve a variety of problems in the physical world by using tools to build things. A good carpenter, one who is competent at a variety of jobs, has many tools available and knows how to use them. He or she has hammers, saws, rulers, squares, files, drills, etc. He uses the saws to cut, not to hammer, the hammers to drive nails, not to chop through boards with, etc. A poor carpenter would be one who doesn't have the necessary tools to do the job, or who can't improvise adequately from the tools he does have. A poor carpenter could also be one who has the necessary tools, but doesn't know how to use them properly, or, for whatever reason, won't use

them properly.

These two dimensions of adequacy in carpentry, having the right tools and knowing how to use them properly, are analogous to two conceptual dimensions for looking at relative enlightenment. The tools are like the skills that you have. Some tools are available in many states of consciousness, others only in particular states. The ability to enter into the appropriate state of consciousness to make a needed skill optimally available is the degree of relative enlightenment you have with respect to available states of consciousness. The ability to use each skill intelligently and properly, according to its inherent characteristics, given the state of consciousness you are in, is the degree of relative enlightenment you show within a particular state of consciousness.

Thus there are two conceptual dimensions on which degree of relative enlightenment will vary for any given person. What states are available to him, with their particular characteristics, talents and costs? This is the available states dimension of relative enlightenment. Within any of these states, how intelligently does the person understand and skillfully use the characteristics of that state? That is the within states dimension of relative enlightenment.

A person may be relatively enlightened on one of these dimensions and not on another. Like a carpenter with only one tool that he uses splendidly, a given person might be "stuck," for example, in consensus consciousness, with no access to altered states, and yet be mature, intelligent, and enlightened in the way he uses the mental abilities he has. He is relatively enlightened within that one state, but deficient in overall relative enlightenment through lack of access to other states. From the point of view of complete enlightenment, perfect relative enlightenment within any single state is nevertheless a quite unenlightened condition. Another person might be like a sloppy carpenter, having access to many tools/states, but using them poorly. I have certainly

known people who could enter many exotic altered states, but whose unintelligent and neurotic behavior certainly would not be described as even relatively enlightened.

Let us look more closely at the qualities we would associate with within-state relative enlightenment.

### Qualities of Within-State Enlightenment

Basic awareness is the ultimate essence of any state of consciousness, so within-state relative enlightenment would include the ability to focus one's awareness as desired, within the limits of the natural capacity of that state. Ideally any aspect of the state could be focused on, brought to awareness. Some altered states may be inherently "fuzzy" in this respect, others sharper than consensus consciousness. Such limits should be found by empirical trial, not by pre-established beliefs which might artificially limit the capacity. Since initial awareness is usually the prerequisite for using a capacity, this sets the stage for use.

An ability to focus awareness as needed by the survival and growth needs of the person is also a quality of within-state relative enlightenment. You might desire, for instance, to focus on a pleasing aspect of a situation you are in, say the taste of a good meal you are eating. But if there is a potentially dangerous aspect of the situation, you had better perceive it, even if it is unpleasant and you would rather be aware of pleasant things. Giving priority to more basic needs over less important desires is a quality of within-state relative enlightenment.

Undistorted perception/simulation of the world, within the inherent limits of the state, is another important quality of within-state relative enlightenment. In consensus consciousness or in a drug-induced state, for

example, the nature of the human eye sets some ultimate limits on what can be visually perceived, but the constructed nature of visual perception after the initial stimulation of the eye can vary greatly in its accuracy. Seeing people as threatening when they are friendly, for example, can lead to treating them in a hostile manner and evoking a consequent negative reaction, which is unenlightened and leads to useless suffering. Seeing them as gods or goddesses when they are actually hostile will similarly lead to suffering<sup>2</sup>.

I am not sure that there is any one state of consciousness that offers totally unlimited and undistorted perception of the world around us. Every state that I know of seems to offer perceptual, cognitive, and affectual advantages in some respects, and disadvantages in other respects. This quality of states may also be true for psychic functioning. In theory we can imagine some ultimate state which has all the desirable qualities of all other states. Tibetan Buddhism, for example, claims this is the case for complete enlightenment (see, e.g., Mullin, 1985). Western scientific knowledge of altered states at this time (and our knowledge is young) does not suggest that such a state, complete enlightenment, exists, but rather that consciousness generally organizes into discrete states with specific properties. There are state-specific kinds of knowledge and capacities, fully available only within a particular state.

Insofar as this limitation is valid, recognition of the state of consciousness you are currently in and knowledge of its advantages and disadvantages, leading to optimal use of the current state, is another important quality of within-state relative enlightenment. This leads to another quality of relative enlightenment which applies to the available-states dimension as well as the within-states dimension of relative enlightenment, namely recognition that the state of consciousness you are currently in may not very useful for handling the life-situation or problem you are currently facing.

### The Available-States Dimension of Enlightenment

The recognition that you are in a state that may not be useful, or at least not optimal, for dealing with a current situation is one quality of the available-states dimension of relative enlightenment. You might be called upon, for example, to help settle an argument between lovers, but be in a state of rage from an earlier, unrelated encounter. A state of rage might be highly useful for saving your life in certain kinds of situations, such as when you are attacked by a wild animal, but its characteristics do not include the calm sensitivity about hurt feelings between lovers that are required to help them remember their basic love for each other! You don't have the right tool for the job.

If you recognized your current state and understood it enough to know it was not a good one for dealing with your current situation, you could try to postpone action until you happened to be in a more appropriate state. This is a second quality of available-states relative enlightenment. A more active form of this quality would be knowing what state is optimal for the situation you are currently in and knowing how to end your current, inappropriate state and induce the optimal one. You pick a better tool for the job at hand.

A third quality of relative enlightenment on the available-states dimension is that you not only have a clear understanding of your basic nature as it manifests in the state you are currently in, but you have at least a some recognition that this is only a partial view that needs to be supplemented by the knowledge available to you in other states. Thus knowledge and action in any particular state would be tempered by previous knowledge gained in other states of consciousness.

For example, I may be in a state of rage, and as I get the advantage of my

opponent it is perfectly "natural" and "reasonable," given my state, to want to destroy him utterly and to know I will enjoy destroying him! That is the inherent "logic" of a state of rage. There may be relatively unenlightened inhibition of my urge to destroy in this example. It may be checked by the emotional conditioning of my superego, or by my fear of the consequences of my action. More enlightened control may occur if, in my state of rage, I recall other states in which I have recognized my kinship with my opponent and have had compassion for him. Then I may terminate my state of rage and enter a more appropriate state, more appropriate in the light of at least partial recall of my values across several states of consciousness. If I cannot voluntarily end the state of rage at will, I can at least keep myself from acting wholeheartedly on the basis of my current rage.

To more fully illustrate this kind of available-state relative enlightenment, suppose you are in some state where you are compassionate, but you are dealing with someone who is enraged. The "tool" of the enraged state may be available to you: you could use the other's rage as an induction technique to enrage yourself if you thought that would be the optimal state to deal with the enraged individual. Or you can draw on your personal memory of what it is like to be enraged to more fully understand the enraged person you are dealing with, and then act compassionately in a more effective way because of your partial knowledge of what being enraged is like. I say partial knowledge because some aspects of the knowledge of rage are state-specific, but enough can be known in consensus consciousness to be useful. The capacity to choose to become enraged or not, and/or to draw on knowledge from previous experience in a rage state, gives you an advantage over someone who cannot voluntarily enter that state or draw on its knowledge.

This ability to recognize what state you are in and draw on relevant knowledge from other states, as well as having the ability to enter those other



states if you desire, implies some aspect of consciousness, of our basic awareness, that transcends any particular state we are in at the time. The nature of that quality is of profound interest (see Tart, 1986), and is probably related to an inherent psi aspect of our minds, but discussion of it is beyond our scope here.

A fourth quality of the available-states dimension of relative enlightenment is that access to multiple states of consciousness allows sharper discrimination between our basic and our acquired natures. The bulk of the conditioning and shaping of our acquired nature, our enculturation, took place in consensus consciousness or in some emotional state that is ordinarily accessed from consensus consciousness. Sometimes simply being in some altered state gives an "outside" perspective on the conditioned, restrictive quality of consensus consciousness. This kind of insight may be sufficient in and of itself to dissolve the conditioning or may at least form a basis for focused work on it.

Note this could be useful in enhancing psi functioning. Much of the indoctrination that is part of consensus consciousness inhibits psi functioning. A perspective that reduced the absoluteness of consensus consciousness could lower that inhibition. This may be a primary reason why so many psychics like to function in some altered state.

A fifth quality of the available-states dimension of relative enlightenment involves a realistic assessment of your capacities, including the fact that some may only be potentials requiring development at present. A quality experienced in a particular state may need considerable work to become robust and usable in that state, or for you to learn to transfer that quality into some other state, such as consensus consciousness. An experience of great compassion experienced in a meditative state, for example, may apparently carry over into consensus

consciousness, making you feel like a very enlightened being, until someone insults you and the feeling of compassion is immediately replaced by anger! This kind of discrimination between developed reality and potential is particularly important when there is excessive attachment to an altered states experience, such that you want to believe that you have made apparent desirable capacities experienced in altered states a permanent part of you. Failure to make this discrimination is a major cause of problems.

Failure to make such discriminations is also a major obstacle to psi functioning. Because we seem psychic in some altered state does not always mean that we are.

#### Psi, Empathy and Compassion

Earlier I mentioned that greatly increased compassion for others is considered both an inherent outcome of relative and complete enlightenment in many spiritual traditions and as a means of seeking enlightenment. Compassion operates from a base of empathy, an ability to "resonate with" or feel another's feelings. The basic human capacity for empathy is innate, part of the "hardware" of being human, as it were. Sensory perceptions of facial expression, posture, style of movement, speed, pitch and intensity of speech, etc. are the usual indicators of another's emotional state.

Enlightened compassion would also be effective compassion (Tart, 1985; 1986). Unfortunately we can be mistaken in our perception of just what another's emotional state is and so believe we are empathizing with them when we are not. This can happen if (a) his emotional state is sufficiently complex such that the cues he puts out are not clear or are misleading; (b) he deliberately and or unconsciously dissimulates; or (c) our own internal processes distort or distract from our perception of the other. While (c) would theoretically not happen for a perfectly enlightened person, recall that we deal

with degrees and aspects of relative enlightenment here.

An ability to telepathically scan another's thoughts, and especially their feelings, would obviously be of immense value in making empathy a more accurate function. This in turn would make compassion more effective, as subsequent compassionate action would be based on sounder knowledge. If the person you wish to help is, for example, looking angry, acting angry, and talking angrily you may empathize with the wrongs done him and feel empathic indignation. If a telepathic scan shows a deep feeling of depression hidden behind the anger, you may realize that empathizing with indignation is actually hindering effective compassionate action, as it only reinforces the feeling of anger which serves as a screen to avoid dealing with the more fundamental depression.

This discussion assumes that such telepathic scanning is itself a relatively undistorted form of perception. If psychological processes in the user seriously distort such psychic scanning, however, it might lower rather than increase the overall accuracy of perception. Knowing how to use psi as effectively as possible in whatever state you were in would be an aspect of within-state relative enlightenment. Knowing how to get into a state that allowed even more effective use of psi than the one you were in would be an aspect of the available states dimension of relative enlightenment.

#### Psi and the Causes of Suffering

As the above discussion of using telepathic scanning to more accurately detect emotional states in others illustrates, a general use of psi abilities to discover the causes of suffering in others would be useful in increasing the effectiveness of compassionate action toward others.

My stress on causes here goes beyond just more accurate perception of the current state of another's thoughts and feelings, though. Consider the

generally accepted psychological idea that maladaptive feelings and behaviors are usually caused by past experiences and the person's reactions to those past experiences. A past cause of present suffering might have been a single traumatic event in the past or a series of such events, in both cases leading to distortions of perception, feeling, ideation, and behavioral functioning in the person that later produce suffering. Insofar as the initiating causes are no longer consciously accessible to a sufferer, he cannot deal with them effectively. Special techniques in psychotherapy for making these initiating events conscious are one way of ultimately dealing with them. A psychic scan of the person's relevant past experiences by a relatively enlightened person is another.

A technical objection should be considered here. Most psychotherapy is a long, involved, and (too often) relatively ineffective process. Since traumatic instigating events often have active, unconscious, and automated defenses operating to protect them from discovery, why would our relatively enlightened psychic scanner be expected to be any more successful than a conventional psychotherapist at finding relevant instigating events? Might it not take hours or hundreds of hours of psychic work to finally hit on them, just as it often takes hours or hundreds of hours of psychotherapeutic exploration to discover deep causes, even allowing for the skills of both the psychotherapist and our relatively enlightened scanner?

Perhaps, but the concept of the goal directed nature of psi derived from laboratory work suggests that the enlightened scanner may have an important advantage. Many parapsychological experiments have achieved positive results where the mechanics of the psi task were unknown and probably incomprehensible to the percipients or agents. In the standard electronic random event generator PK task, for example, the agent is asked to make one flashing lamp light up more often than another. The typical agent has no sensory or intellectual knowledge

of the particular electronic circuits that control the flashing lamps, yet may get positive results. This has led to the idea that psi is inherently goal directed and unconcerned with mechanism, so the complexity and mechanical nature of the psi task are irrelevant (see, e.g., Stanford, 1978). Insofar as this idea is true of psi functioning in general, our relatively enlightened scanner may have an important advantage over a psychotherapist in that he quickly gets the relevant information about the cause of the person's suffering without having to go through the numerous, inefficient serial steps the psychotherapist goes through.

We know from psychotherapy, of course, that simply knowing the cause of a person's suffering does not always cure it. Sometimes just revealing it to the sufferer is sufficient, but many times the sufferer has to work his way up to seeing it. If the psychotherapist or relatively enlightened helper has a clear idea of where the therapy process should go, though, the process can obviously be made more efficient.

#### Psi and Access to Non-Physical Assistance

Our contemporary materialistic view is that all life is completely identical with its physical substrate, a philosophical position formally called the psychoneural identity hypothesis. No one who was traditionally recognized as at least moderately enlightened ever held to this position, however. All have believed that while life and consciousness strongly interact with physical matter, mind itself is at least an independent entity, existing apart from matter, or, at its extreme, that physical matter is only a more persistent form of mind.

Communication among physically embodied beings, by mainstream scientific views, occurs only when physical energy or matter passes between them. Light

rays are necessary to see, molecules must reach the nose for smell, etc. Similarly it is held that mind can only affect the physical world by physical actions of the body. The major contribution of parapsychology has been to demonstrate that this is a partial, not a complete truth. Usually there must be matter and energy transfer for you to perceive the world or another being, but sometimes perception occurs without any known form of matter and energy transfer. The three well established forms of such non-physical communication are what we call telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition. The direct mental influence of desire on the world (and possibly on other life) is what we call psychokinesis (PK).

My assessment of current evidence is that there is no clear way these four forms of psi can be explained in terms of known physical energies or matters, even allowing for straightforward progress in more refined understanding of matter and energy. This view is not universal among parapsychologists, but it is widely held. Thus parapsychology, with a little extrapolation, has established an empirical basis for considering mind to be an independently existing entity<sup>3</sup>.

Insofar as mind can exist and manifest independently of matter, we have a scientifically-based world view similar to that of reputedly enlightened people. Thus the idea of more enlightened, more evolved conscious entities who exist only on some non-physical level of reality, an idea accepted by all enlightened people I have known of, may be reasonably considered. This idea is totally rejected by mainstream materialistic science, of course, and arouses much resistance among parapsychologists who want acceptance from mainstream science, but it is important to consider it in the context of enlightenment.

How would we perceive and interact with such non-physical beings? By one or more forms of psi. Thus we come to an important need for psi abilities as an aspect of both relative and complete enlightenment: it is the only way to



communicate and interact with possible<sup>4</sup> entities who may be useful sources of information and assistance.

The nature, power, and importance of non-physical entities is different in various spiritual traditions. Theistically oriented ones like Christianity and Islam place God in the position of Supreme Being. Enlightenment, in addition and sometimes instead of the aspects of it discussed earlier in this paper, is conceived of as a matter of direct communication with and/or union with God. Non-theistic traditions like Buddhism, by contrast, usually recognize the existence of non-physical beings, but stress that our own inherent nature is the same as that of the entire universe, including the highest. Thus full enlightenment is a matter of realizing that identity rather than looking for assistance from or union with a higher being outside yourself. There is nothing that is truly "outside" your Self in an ultimate sense. Indeed, non-physical beings are not inherently enlightened simply by virtue of being non-physical. Buddhism, for example, sees the human condition as actually the most advantageous in terms of capacity for seeking and realizing various aspects of full enlightenment.

In terms of exercising effective compassion, non-physical entities may, however, be of assistance by virtue of their psychic or other abilities. Thus developing the psychic abilities to contact them (and sufficient relative enlightenment not to be over-impressed with or overwhelmed by them) could be an important aspect of relative enlightenment. Although we as yet have no adequate scientific base to adequately evaluate the independent existence, virtues, or drawbacks of what for us are postulated higher level non-physical entities, various spiritual traditions believe that they may be sources of information about the person to be helped, may give psychological/spiritual energy to the person to be helped or to the helper, and may intervene in ordinary physical

affairs to bring "luck" or avert disaster.

Another important use for psychic abilities in contacting non-physical beings is to receive further teachings about enlightenment from them. The teachings might be for the benefit of the finder's own enlightenment and/or for others. There is much contemporary, if largely non-scientific, interest in this under the concept of channeling. Padmasambhava, the Buddha who brought Buddhism to Tibet, for example, is reputed to have left many teachings about paths to enlightenment hidden because people were not ready for them yet, or because they would be especially appropriate at some later time when world conditions had changed.

#### Psi as a Tool for Investigating the Nature of the World

Ostensible psychic functioning also plays a vital part in enlightenment traditions for discovering the true nature of the world. By clairvoyantly examining his own past incarnations, for example, the Buddha could investigate the nature of reincarnation and the mechanisms of karma. When asked about why some sacred teachings are the way they are, current teachers may say that the tradition's founder was, besides or as part of being enlightened, an expert clairvoyant and thus directly saw the way things are. The existence of psi abilities as a more direct way of knowing things relegate the consciousness as world simulator model to a useful but non-absolute role.

Judging from the performance of contemporary psychics, I am inclined to give partial acceptance to this view in general, but to be open-minded yet skeptical of any particular teachings or beliefs supposedly obtained through psi. While these psychic stars can sometimes produce amazingly accurate descriptions of hidden targets, they usually produce inaccurate or distorted impressions of the same targets too. We make this distinction in retrospect after comparing the psychic description with the target: it is not,

unfortunately, usually made by the psychic during the impression period. I have proposed that immediate feedback training could make psychics much more accurate at this (Tart, 1975; 1976) and it seems to have worked well in remote viewing work (Targ & Harary, 1984), but even the best psychics still make many mistakes.

None of the psychics extensively studied by parapsychologists under laboratory conditions over the years has been reputed to be enlightened. Some were rather neurotic, some quite mature, many were of ordinary levels of psychological maturity. Since some of the missing and distortion shown is probably due to unconscious dynamics causing distortion of the received psychic material, it is reasonable to suppose that the possession of various aspects of relative enlightenment, as discussed above, would reduce this distortion. Just which aspects reduce distortions to what degrees is a matter for empirical research. It is certainly reasonable to suppose that a person could be relatively enlightened in many ways and still show inaccuracies in psychic functioning, based on what we know empirically today. Thus the apparently psychically based ideas of relatively enlightened persons still need to be evaluated as to accuracy and usefulness, not just accepted because they were ostensibly discovered through the use of psychic abilities.

#### Psi and Reinforcement of Faith

To put forth the energy and dedication needed to seek enlightenment requires a high degree of initial faith. You don't invest heavily in something you don't believe in.

This initial faith could be "blind faith" in the sense of a person being raised to believe in a world view that makes enlightenment desirable and practical, without any contradictory beliefs weakening his ability to focus on attaining enlightenment. The initial faith could also be a pathological "blind

faith" in that there is active suppression or repression of real doubts and contradictions.

Of more interest, one could begin seeking relative enlightenment with what I have been calling experimental belief (Tart, 1986) or experimental faith. Here you consciously recognize that there may be reasons to doubt the truth or practicality of what you intend, but you also recognize that if you do not invest enough energy in your efforts you will probably fail for that reason alone. Lack of faith can guarantee failure regardless of the reality of the path you attempt to follow. Thus you must deliberately decide to put your doubts aside for the time being, to the best of your ability, and give the path you want to follow as much energy and belief as you can. At some future time you can draw back and evaluate what has resulted from working with your experimental faith. This sort of experimental belief is important for us Westerners to explore.

Initial faith is fine for getting started, but to keep going on a long term project like seeking relative enlightenment you need occasional results that appear to validate your initial faith. Here is where psi events and capacities provide reinforcement.

If occasional spontaneous psi events happen to the person seeking relative enlightenment, they will probably be interpreted (correctly or incorrectly) as validating the particular spiritual system he is following. Do they not transcend ordinary reality? Isn't this a sign that something is happening from the enlightenment seeking practices, even if they are not exactly what was expected? This is a general validation applicable to all religious systems, whether simple or complex. If psi events seem to happen as a fairly direct result of enlightenment related practices this will provide even stronger reinforcement.

## In Sum

In the West we have a large and rather disorganized body of knowledge about altered states of consciousness and parapsychology. The purposes you have determine the kinds of questions you ask about reality, and the kinds of answers you get. Our Western questions about altered states and psi phenomena have been motivated by a variety of purposes, such as simple curiosity, disciplined scientific curiosity, the desire to alleviate suffering in others, the pursuit of personal power, and the pursuit of enlightenment. Our knowledge is relatively deep in some areas, quite shallow in others.

As I understand the enlightenment traditions, the motivation behind the acquisition of knowledge about altered states has been more focused: how can we alleviate suffering, in ourselves and in others? I suspect that has led to a more coherent body of knowledge, but perhaps one that is narrower in some ways. I share the desire to alleviate suffering, yet I'm also just curious. We live in a wonderful, mysterious, intriguing universe. Altered states and psi are some of those wonders. We have only been able to touch on a few aspects of enlightenment, altered states of consciousness and psi, but I hope that the ideas briefly expressed in this paper will stimulate psychological curiosity about enlightenment, and that the developing interchanges between East and West will enrich us all in both satisfying our curiosity and in relieving the suffering of all sentient beings.

Notes

- 1 Complete enlightenment, such as that described for a fully realized Buddha in Tibetan Buddhism (see, e.g., Mullin, 1985), might involve such a permanent change in our being that all knowledge and skill was available in a permanently enlightened state that replaced ordinary consciousness, such that state-specificity was no longer a reality.
- 2 I refer to ordinary perceptual distortions here, not the deliberate spiritual practice of trying to see the divine in others, no matter what they do, as a learning device.
- 3 This does not mean that we should not actively pursue research on neurological aspects of mental functioning, of course, but it does mean that we should actively investigate mind on its own terms, rather than passively waiting for progress in physics or neurophysiology to somehow explain mind "away."
- 4 When I say "possible," I am reflecting Western mainstream scientific caution. I cannot think of anyone recognized as enlightened who did not explicitly believe in the reality of non-physical beings, usually as a result of direct personal experience in interacting with such beings.



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